

Message Text

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INR/REC: L J KENNON
EUR/EE: A THOMPSON
EUR/RPE: J POLANSKY
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FROM WASHINGTON
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NATO CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL FROM WASHINGTON

SUBJECT: POLAND'S REVISED ECONOMIC PLAN: A PARTIAL
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ADJUSTMENT TO REALITY

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. RAPIDLY MOUNTING HARD CURRENCY DEBT AND
THE THREAT OF UNREST AT HOME CAUSED THE POLIS; LEADERSHIP
TO ALTER ITS ECONOMIC POLICY SHARPLY IN THE FINAL MONTHS OF
1976. THE PRINCIPAL CHANGE WILL BE REDUCED EMPHASIS ON
RAPID GROWTH IN REAL GNP THROUGH RAPID INCREASES IN CAPITAL

INVESTMENT AND IMPORTS OF WESTERN CAPITAL GOODS. THE
SHARE OF INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT IN AGGREGATE OUTPUT IS

SLATED TO DECLINE IN 1977 AND BEYOND, WITH GROWTH IN INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT OUTLAYS IN REAL TERMS LIKELY, AT LEAST FOR A WHILE, TO COME TO A HALT.

2. THE PURPOSE OF CUTTING THE PROPORTION OF INVESTMENT IN GNP IS, FIRST, TO MAKE A LARGER SHARE OF POLISH PRODUCTION IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE TO CONSUMERS AND, SECOND, TO SLOW THE RISE IN HARD CURRENCY DEBT. POLAND'S DRIVE, INITIATED IN 1970, TO INCREASE AND MODERNIZE ITS INDUSTRIAL CAPITAL STOCK HAS DEPENDED HEAVILY ON LARGE-SCALE IMPORTS OF WESTERN MACHINERY. SUCH IMPORTS, WHICH HAVE ACCOUNTED FOR A HIGH PROPORTION OF POLISH HARD CURRENCY EXPENDITURES, ARE NOW SCHEDULED TO LEVEL OFF OR FALL.

3. ANOTHER MAJOR ELEMENT IN POLAND'S REVAMPED ECONOMIC POLICY WILL BE ENCOURAGEMENT OF EXPANDED PRIVATE SECTOR ACTIVITY, NOTABLY IN AGRICULTURE. THE REGIME EVIDENTLY BELIEVES THAT A GREATER ROLE FOR WHAT AMOUNTS TO FREE ENTERPRISE WILL ENHANCE PRODUCTIVITY, PARTICULARLY IN AREAS THAT PROVIDE GOODS AND SERVICES TO CONSUMERS.

4. THE OUTLOOK FOR THE NEW POLICY IS NOT REASSURING, AT LEAST WITH RESPECT TO HOLDING RISES IN HARD CURRENCY DEBT TO ACCEPTABLE LEVELS. IT SEEMS MOST LIKELY THAT IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS POLAND WILL HAVE TO TURN PERIODICALLY TO SOME OF ITS MORE AMENABLE WESTERN CREDITORS TO REARRANGE
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REPAYMENT SCHEDULES. END SUMMARY.

5. BEGIN TEXT. POLAND HAS SUSTAINED A VERY HIGH RATE OF REAL ECONOMIC GROWTH SINCE 1970--ABOUT 6 PERCENT ANNUALLY--BY INVESTING HEAVILY IN INDUSTRIAL MODERNIZATION AND EXPANSION. CAPITAL INVESTMENT, WHICH ACCOUNTED FOR MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF NATIONAL INCOME DURING THIS PERIOD, HAS DEPENDED HEAVILY UPON A MASSIVE INFUSION OF WESTERN MACHINERY, FINANCED IN LARGE PART THROUGH HARD CURRENCY BORROWING.

6. THIS INVESTMENT POLICY HAS CREATED TWO MAJOR PROBLEMS WHICH HAVE MADE ITS CONTINUATION IMPOSSIBLE. FIRST, POLAND'S HARD CURRENCY DEBT NOW HAS REACHED A POINT (ALMOST DOLS 10 BILLION AT YEAREND 1976) AT WHICH THE COUNTRY'S CREDIT RATING HAS DETERIORATED, AND SINCE POLAND IS DETERMINED NOT TO ALLOW ITS RATING TO DETERIORATE FURTHER, IT MIGHT HAVE TO ASK THE MORE AMENABLE OF ITS WESTERN CREDITORS FOR SOME QUIET RESCHEDULING OF ITS DEBT SERVICE OBLIGATIONS. SECOND, THE REGIME'S COMMITMENT TO INVESTMENT IN INDUSTRY HAS IMPAIRED ITS CAPACITY TO

PROVIDE DESIRABLE GOODS TO CONSUMERS, WHO HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY LESS TOLERANT OF SHORTAGES AND THE POOR

QUALITY OF THE GOODS THAT ARE AVAILABLE. BY 1975, THE GOVERNMENT EVEN FOUND ITSELF UNABLE TO SATISFY DOMESTIC DEMAND FOR FOOD (ESPECIALLY MEAT) AT PREVAILING PRICES, THE ONE AREA IN WHICH SUPPLIES HAD IMPROVED SIGNIFICANTLY SINCE 1970 AND TO WHICH THE GIEREK REGIME EXPLICITLY HAS LINKED ITS DOMESTIC PRESTIGE.

7. IN JUNE 1976, THE REGIME RESPONDED TO THESE PROBLEMS BY RAISING RETAIL FOOD PRICES IN ORDER TO APPLY LIMITS TO DOMESTIC FOOD CONSUMPTION AND TO PERMIT THE MAINTENANCE OF A HEAVY, ALBEIT REDUCED, VOLUME OF INDUSTRIAL IMPORTS. THE PRICE INCREASES WERE EXPECTED TO BRING SUPPLY AND DEMAND
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FOR FOOD INTO BETTER BALANCE, THUS PERMITTING A GREATER PROPORTION OF DEMAND FOR FOOD TO BE SATISFIED FROM DOMESTIC PRODUCTION, AT A LARGE SAVINGS IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE.

8. THE EFFICACY OF THIS MOVE BECAME MOOT WHEN THE PRICE INCREASES WERE REPUDIATED BY THE POPULATION. THE JUNE RIOTS HAVE PRODUCED TWO MAJOR ECONOMIC RESULTS.

(A)--THEY FORCED THE LEADERSHIP, AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS OF VACILLATION, TO CALL FOR MORE REDUCTIONS IN INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENTS THAT UTILIZE WESTERN CAPITAL AS THE PRIMARY MEANS OF REDUCING POLAND'S HARD CURRENCY TRADE DEFICIT.

(B)--MORE IMPORTANT, THEY PROVIDED A CONVINCING DEMONSTRATION TO THE REGIME OF THE POLITICAL RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ANY ATTEMPT TO DEPART FROM ITS COMMITMENT TO STEADY INCREASES IN DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION AT "REASONABLE" PRICES, WHICH TO THE POLISH PUBLIC MEAN VIRTUALLY INVARIANT PRICES.

AS A RESULT, THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN FORCED NOT ONLY TO MOVE VERY CAUTIOUSLY WITH RESPECT TO FUTURE PRICE INCREASES, BUT ALSO TO COMMIT ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION IN ORDER TO BUY TIME FOR ITS EFFORTS TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE DEBT PROBLEM.

9. ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR: THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS LATTER CONSIDERATION IS REFLECTED IN POLAND'S REVISED ECONOMIC PLAN FOR 1976-80, APPROVED BY THE SEJM (PARLIAMENT) IN DECEMBER. THE SHARE OF TOTAL INVESTMENT IN NATIONAL INCOME, WHICH ALREADY HAD FALLEN FROM 32 PERCENT IN 1975 TO 28.8 PERCENT LAST YEAR, IS TO FALL AN ADDITIONAL 1.4 PERCENT IN 1977 AND IS TO BE REDUCED FURTHER IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS. IN ADDITION, INVESTMENT IN

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HEAVY INDUSTRY IS TO BE REDUCED IN REAL TERMS, WHILE INVESTMENT IN AGRICULTURE, FOOD INDUSTRY, AND HOUSING IS TO RISE FROM 33 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL IN 1971-75 TO 43 PERCENT IN 1976-80. PRODUCTION FOR ALL DOMESTIC USES IS TO INCREASE BY 60 PERCENT, COMPARED WITH A PROJECTED 42 TO 45 PERCENT IN THE ORIGINAL PLAN, AND THE SUPPLY OF SERVICES TO THE CONSUMER IS EXPECTED TO RISE BY 70 PERCENT.

10. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF THE NEW PLAN, HOWEVER, IS THAT THE REGIME--IN A MAJOR DEPARTURE FROM PAST POLISH PRACTICE--APPARENTLY WILL ENCOURAGE INCREASED PRODUCTION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, BOTH IN THE SERVICE INDUSTRIES AND IN AGRICULTURE. LEADERSHIP STATEMENTS HAVE INDICATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT EXPECTS MUCH OF THE 70-PERCENT GROWTH IN THE SUPPLY OF SERVICES TO THE POPULATION TO BE PROVIDED BY EXPANDED PRIVATE BUSINESS ACTIVITY. THE GOVERNMENT HAS PROMISED TO FACILITATE THIS BY:

(A)--RAISING THE TAX-FREE LIMIT ON PRIVATE SERVICE INCOME BY 500 PERCENT;

(B)--REDUCING TURNOVER TAXES ON PRIVATELY RUN BUSINESSES;

(C)--IMPROVING THE SUPPLY AND DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIALS TO PRIVATE BUSINESSES; AND

(D)--MAKING PRIVATE BUSINESSMEN IN THE SERVICE SECTOR ELIGIBLE FOR BENEFITS UNDER POLAND'S COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM.

11. MORE SIGNIFICANT, HOWEVER, IS AN APPARENT CHANGE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY ON PRIVATE AGRICULTURE. EVER SINCE THE ABANDONMENT OF COLLECTIVIZATION, THIS POLICY HAS FOCUSED UPON: 1) REDUCTION IN ACREAGE HELD IN PRIVATE HANDS THROUGH ATTRITION, THE PURCHASE OF LAND FOR ITS REDISTRIBUTION TO STATE FARMS, AND/OR REALLOCATION FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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FARMING UNDER CONTRACT WITH THE STATE; AND 2) RESOLUTE OPPOSITION TO THE OPERATION OF LARGE, PROFITABLE PRIVATE FARMS. NOW, IN AN EFFORT TO INCREASE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, THE REGIME APPEARS TO BE MOVING TOWARD THE POSITION THAT EFFICIENT FARMS, WHETHER STATE-OWNED OR PRIVATE, ARE TO BE ENCOURAGED, AND THERE HAS BEEN PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THE POSSIBILITY OF INCREASING THE MAXIMUM PERMISSIBLE SIZE OF PRIVATELY OWNED HOLDINGS. PARTY FIRST SECRETARY GIEREK, IN A SPEECH TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE ON DECEMBER 1, STATED THAT THE PARTY MUST OPPOSE THE TENDENCY OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO REFUSE THE REDISTRIBUTION OF LAND TO PRIVATE FARMERS "WHERE THIS PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR

ITS BEST UTILIZATION." PRIME MINISTER JAROSZEWICZ SUBSEQUENTLY INFORMED THE SEJM THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF "WELL-ORGANIZED...SPECIALIZED...INDIVIDUAL FARMS."

12. IF THE GOVERNMENT DELIVERS ON ITS PROMISES TO PRIVATE BUSINESS AND AGRICULTURE, INCREASED PRODUCTION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR COULD GENERATE NEW, HIGHER-QUALITY GOODS FOR THE DOMESTIC MARKET--WHICH WOULD BOTH REDUCE CONSUMER DISCONTENT AND RELIEVE PRESSURE FOR INCREASED HARD CURRENCY IMPORTS OF CONSUMER GOODS. THE REGIME'S SUCCESS IN ACHIEVING SUCH A RESULT WILL DEPEND UPON ITS ABILITY TO CONVINCE THE POPULATION THAT ITS ENCOURAGEMENT OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE IS NOT MERELY A TEMPORARY EXPEDIENT. PARTY CHIEF GIEREK ATTEMPTED TO CREATE THIS IMPRESSION DURING HIS VISIT TO MOSCOW IN NOVEMBER BY PERSUADING THE SOVIETS TO RECEIVE A "UNITED" DELEGATION THAT ALSO INCLUDED MEMBERS OF POLAND'S TWO MINOR PARTIES, WHICH, AT LEAST SYMBOLICALLY, REPRESENT THE ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF THE PEASANTRY AND SMALL BUSINESSMEN. THE SOVIETS THUS APPEAR TO HAVE RECOGNIZED A NEED FOR DIVERSITY INVOLVING A MEASURE OF INCREASED PRIVATE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN POLAND. CONFIDENTIAL

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13. A BLEAK OUTLOOK FOR HARD CURRENCY TRADE: THE REVISED PLAN CALLS FOR AN INCREASE IN OVERALL IMPORTS OF 25 PERCENT DURING 1976-80, DOWN FROM THE ORIGINAL GROWTH PROJECTION OF 57 PERCENT. PLANNED OVERALL EXPORTS ARE TO INCREASE BY 75 PERCENT (COMPARED WITH THE ORIGINAL PROJECTION IN EXCESS OF 100 PERCENT), REFLECTING THE LEADERSHIP'S INTENTION TO INCREASE DOMESTIC SUPPLIES OF CONSUMER GOODS. LEADERSHIP STATEMENTS SUGGEST THAT NO INCREASE AT ALL IS PLANNED IN HARD CURRENCY IMPORTS, WHILE THE GROWTH TARGET OF 75 PERCENT FOR EXPORTS IS TO APPLY BOTH TO THE COUNCIL FOR MUTUAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE (CEMA) AND TO HARD CURRENCY TRADE.

14. IT IS QUESTIONABLE, HOWEVER, WHETHER THESE TARGETS CAN BE ACHIEVED. POLAND'S ABILITY TO INCREASE HARD CURRENCY EXPORTS DEPENDS HEAVILY UPON THE MAINTENANCE OF WESTERN ECONOMIC PROSPERITY; EXPORT GROWTH WAS SLUGGISH IN 1976 DURING THE FALTERING RECOVERY FROM THE RECESSION OF 1975. ON THE IMPORT SIDE, A FREEZE ON HARD CURRENCY IMPORTS WILL BE POSSIBLE ONLY IF: 1) GRAIN HARVESTS DURING 1977-80 ARE LARGE ENOUGH TO REDUCE IMPORT REQUIREMENTS SUBSTANTIALLY; 2) LARGE ENOUGH PRODUCTIVITY GAINS ARE REALIZED TO GENERATE THE EXPECTED INCREASE IN THE FLOW OF GOODS TO THE DOMESTIC MARKETS; AND 3) EXPANDED ACTIVITY IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR INDEED REDUCES DEMAND FOR MORE IMPORTED

CONSUMER GOODS. IF EVEN ONE OF THESE CONDITIONS IS NOT MET, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO REALIZE THE FOREIGN TRADE

TARGETS.

15. FURTHERMORE, IT IS NOT CLEAR WHY THE REGIME EXPECTS THAT ACHIEVEMENT OF THE NEW TARGETS FOR HARD CURRENCY TRADE WOULD BRING TRADE WITH THE WEST INTO ANYTHING APPROACHING BALANCE OR HOLD HARD CURRENCY INDEBTEDNESS TO ACCEPTABLE LEVELS. ASSUMING NO INCREASE IN THE VALUE OF
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HARD CURRENCY IMPORTS IN THE 1976-80 PERIOD, A 75-PERCENT INCREASE IN HARD CURRENCY EXPORTS WOULD STILL RESULT IN A DEFICIT OF ABOUT DOLS 750 MILLION IN TRADE WITH THE WEST DURING THE TERMINAL YEAR OF THE PLAN. POLAND'S HARD CURRENCY INDEBTEDNESS AT YEAREND 1980 PROBABLY WOULD EXCEED DOLS 17 BILLION, VIRTUALLY ENSURING THAT WARSAW WOULD HAVE HAD TO TURN BEFORE THEN TO ITS WESTERN CREDITORS TO REQUEST THE RESCHEDULING OF AT LEAST SOME OF ITS HARD CURRENCY DEBTS.

16. INVESTMENT IN INDUSTRY (AND HENCE THE REQUIRED FLOW OF WESTERN MACHINERY), HOWEVER, MAY ALREADY HAVE BEEN CUT AS FAR AS POSSIBLE WITHOUT JEOPARDIZING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ANNOUNCED TARGETS FOR INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION GROWTH. THE ALREADY PROJECTED REDUCTION IN INVESTMENT AS A SHARE OF NATIONAL INCOME AND THE DIVERSION OF INVESTMENT FROM HEAVY INDUSTRY TO AGRICULTURE AND HOUSING PROBABLY WILL REDUCE GROWTH IN INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION. HOWEVER, GIVEN THE VERY HIGH LEVEL OF INVESTMENT AND THE CONSEQUENT BUILDUP IN THE INDUSTRIAL CAPITAL STOCK IN RECENT YEARS, THE RATE OF GROWTH WILL NOT BE DRASTICALLY LOWER.

17. FURTHER EFFORTS TO REDUCE IMPORTS, HOWEVER--ESPECIALLY IF THEY AFFECT THE FLOW OF INDUSTRIAL RAW MATERIALS AND SEMI-MANUFACTURES FROM THE WEST--PROBABLY WOULD HAMPER INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION SUBSTANTIALLY. SUCH A MOVE WOULD AROUSE OPPOSITION FROM THE PLANNERS AND ENTERPRISE MANAGERS WHO HAVE DEVELOPED A MAJOR STAKE IN CONTINUED RAPID ECONOMIC GROWTH, AND IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER THE REGIME CURRENTLY ENJOYS ENOUGH POPULAR SUPPORT TO OVERRIDE SUCH OBJECTIONS.

18. OUTLOOK: THE POLISH GOVERNMENT HAS MADE A MAJOR CONCESSION TO REALITY IN SHARPLY REVISING ITS ECONOMIC PLANS. IT NOW RECOGNIZES THAT EMPHASIS ON RAPID GROWTH OF GNP WILL HAVE TO BE REDUCED, THAT A LARGER SHARE OF
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PRODUCTION WILL HAVE TO BE DIRECTED TO THE SATISFACTION

OF CONSUMER DEMAND, AND THAT INVESTMENT OUTLAYS, AT LEAST

IN REAL TERMS AND IN THE SHORT RUN, WILL HAVE TO LEVEL
OFF. IT HAS ACCEPTED THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE ECONOMY WILL
GROW AT A PERCEPTIBLY LOWER RATE THAN THAT IN 1971-75.
SOME OF THE POLICY ADJUSTMENTS IT HAS MADE--ESPECIALLY ITS
ENCOURAGEMENT OF EXPANDED PRIVATE SECTOR ACTIVITY--ARE
BOLD AND IMPLY SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURES FROM THE DOMINANT
ECONOMIC POLICIES OF RECENT YEARS. WHETHER THE REGIME HAS
MADE ENOUGH OF AN ADJUSTMENT IN POLICY TO SOLVE ITS
PROBLEMS, HOWEVER, IS OPEN TO QUESTION. THIS ESPECIALLY
APPEARS TO BE THE CASE FOR THE REVISED TARGETS ON FOREIGN
TRADE, WHICH ARE BOTH UNREALISTIC AND UNLIKELY TO ACHIEVE
THE DESIRED RESULTS. END TEXT.
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